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# How To Get A Better Night's Sleep

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# How To Get A Better Night's Sleep

## Exercise Your Way to a Good Night's Sleep

Sleep deprivation is a very common problem in our world today. In fact the Better Sleep Council surveyed a thousand adult respondents and discovered that more than thirty percent of them confessed to not getting enough sleep each night.

The recent survey also revealed that not getting enough sleep affected their daily performance at work and at home in terms of their ability to concentrate, their capacity for problem solving, their coordination and reaction time, their physical strength and energy levels and how they handled stress.

The short-term effects of sleep deprivation are excessive tiredness and a general feeling of irritability but studies have proven that there are long-term effects as well. In order to learn and process information one needs to be able to fall into a deep sleep and also dream. Memory also requires these things as well. The brain is capable of retaining new information for a short quantity of time and that is why it benefits tremendously from restful sleep patterns. Information learned throughout the day can be easily forgotten or lost by the brain if a person is sleep deprived.

Sleep is important to wake up feeling alert, fresh and ready to take on the day. If one wakes up feeling more tired than when one retired the night before it is definitely a sign that more hours of sleep are required. Not everyone needs the exact same amount of sleep per night as it varies from person to person with the normal amount of sleep hours being from five to ten.

Incidentally studies have shown that the average adult receives seven and a half hours every night. As a person ages they don't require quite as much sleep. It is estimated that from the time one is a baby until a person reaches adulthood, sleep is cut in half. Teenagers though need plenty of sleep because they are still growing and are very active. Sleep experts believe teenagers require a greater amount of shuteye than adults, on average from 8.5 to 9.25 hours per night.

Exercising on a regular basis helps to improve the quality of a person's sleep and relieves the daily stresses of life. Sleep experts say that strenuous exercise is not necessary but instead all that it takes is light to moderate exercise. Research on exercise has shown that less than one-third of American adults get enough exercise every day. In fact, forty percent of adults do no form of exercise at all. A complete lack of exercise can be the cause of many health problems such as diabetes, high cholesterol and obesity.

Walking is a moderate form of exercise that is considered "low impact" because it is easy on the joints and can be done by virtually everyone. Walking is not an expensive form of exercise and only requires a good pair of walking shoes or sneakers. Walking is a workout but it is dependent on the fitness level the individual in question is starting out at.

For example, for those who haven't exercised in quite some time or who are overweight they should begin with slow-paced walking, but those in better shape would need to walk more swiftly and longer to reap the benefits. The more vigorous a walking pattern one develops, the more exercise they will get. It is important to walk fast enough to really get the heart rate up!

People who engage in frequent walking admit to enjoying the benefits of physical fitness and to having improved sleep habits as well as an overall better outlook on their life. Studies have proven that walking burns the same amount of calories every hour as does running but it does not put any strain on the body.

Other types of exercises that help improve sleep include yoga, which helps center the body and soul, and jazzercise, which really gets the blood pumping. Jazzercise has been proven to be the largest exercise program across the globe and boasts 5,000 plus instructors who teach more than 19,000 weekly classes to 450,000 students in 38 countries.

This form of exercise is growing in popularity all of the time. It is recommended that light stretching of the muscles and joints be done before any exercises are undertaken. This improves flexibility and cuts down on the incidence of injuries.

Never exercise before bedtime if you desire to have a good night's sleep. Late afternoon or early evening is the best time to set aside for exercise (the former being the very best) and exercise no less than four hours before you turn in for the night.

### **Hypnotherapy for Sleeping Disorders: Fake or Fact?**

The number one cause of sleep problems is stress. While there can be other factors preventing you from sleeping, stress is known to be one of the biggest causes of sleep disorders. Hypnosis is said to be one of the most effective cures for sleep problems. Hypnotherapy is the application of hypnosis as a form of treatment usually for relieving pain or condition related to one's state of mind.

There are several reasons a person has difficulty sleeping. Something may be on your mind and you are not able to switch off enough from your daily events to fall asleep at night. If you have had repeated problems falling asleep, you may develop a fear of lying awake at night. Stress and anxiety can keep you awake as well.

Myths abound about hypnosis, but, in fact, it is little more than a heightened state of awareness in which you are more in touch with your unconscious mind than your conscious one. An example of this is driving a car home and being unaware on reaching home how many robots were red and how many green. Another is watching water moving or fire crackling and losing sense of time. These, like daydreaming, are natural 'trance' states.

Hypnotherapy can be used to resolve sleeping disorders and insomnia which tend to stem from our inner thoughts and feelings playing out in our minds. If you suffer from insomnia, early waking, disturbed sleep, or snoring, hypnotherapy may be beneficial to you. When you are asleep your conscious mind is still at work looking after you. During hypnosis, your mind is free

to forget about the stresses of life and relax. Hypnotherapy can directly access those things that are subconsciously bothering us. Take time to relax your body and program your subconscious mind to help you to fall asleep more quickly and easily each night.

Hypnotherapy can help with getting to sleep by: Re-educating your mind to expect to enjoy a good night's sleep, teaching new relaxation techniques to help your mind and body to slow down at the end of the day. Sleeping becomes much easier in this state, helping you to learn techniques to remove some of the noise from a racing mind. Insomnia and most sleep problems are a very modern phenomenon and representative of the pace of modern life, and helping you to understand some of the causes of insomnia and sleeping problems.

Hypnotherapy has been shown to be useful in reducing or removing the causes of problems occurring during sleep. Generally, hypnotherapy clients' sleep problems fall into two categories. The first is simply not being able to fall asleep at night. The second involves waking up at an inconveniently early hour and not being able to fall asleep again.

Learning effective self-hypnosis skills can help you to significantly improve your sleep patterns and can help with indirect effects of insomnia and sleep problems such as daytime anxiety and bruxism (teeth grinding during the night), sleepwalking, and bedwetting. With the use of Hypnotherapy and Self-Hypnosis you can experience significantly improved sleep, mood, and energy. By learning to successfully use the techniques of self-hypnosis, you will take control of your sleep, mind, and body.

You will be empowered by the realization that the key to conquering insomnia resides within you. Therefore, you will boost your confidence in your personal power and strengthen your sense of self-esteem, which is fundamental to optimal health and well-being.

Here are some other tips for getting to sleep: Avoid caffeine, nicotine and alcohol in the late afternoon and evening. Cut out the afternoon nap if you have difficulty getting to sleep at night. Exercise regularly, but don't do it so close to bedtime. Keep a regular sleep routine; for instance brushing your teeth, your hair, reading a book, or listening to hypnosis.

Don't use your bed for anything other than sleep or sex. Your bed should be associated with sleep. Create a pleasant, comfortable, and quiet sleep environment. If you can't go to sleep after 30 minutes, don't fight it any longer ... put on a hypnosis CD or read or even journal about your thoughts or your feelings.

### **Melatonin Madness – A Natural Sleep Aid**

Melatonin is an all natural sleep aide. It's secreted by the pineal gland, a small pea size gland in the center of the brain, as our eyes register the fall of darkness. At night melatonin is produced to help our bodies regulate our sleep and wake cycles. The amount of melatonin produced by our bodies decreases as we get older. Scientists believe this may be why young people have less of a problem sleeping than older people will. Though we create our own melatonin, this can also be bought in the form of supplements.

It is believed that melatonin supplements make it easier sleep and ease jet lag, without the hazards or side effects of prescription and over the counter sleeping pills. Melatonin may have many other uses and has been reported to make people feel better, strengthen the immune system, and reduce free radicals in the body.

Currently, research is being done to also determine melatonin's effect as an anti-oxidant. Tests are still being done now because there is much still to be learned about melatonin and its effects on the human body.

Many parents are now offering melatonin to their children who have been diagnosed with hyperactivity or autism. Some parents claim the effects of the melatonin has calmed and relaxed anxiety ridden children. While this may be true for some children, it's not the answer for everyone. Check with your pediatrician before starting any supplement programs with your child.

According to wikipedia.com, melatonin is a powerful antioxidant that can easily cross cell membranes and the blood-brain barrier. Unlike other antioxidants, melatonin does not undergo redox cycling, which is the ability of a molecule to undergo reduction and oxidation repeatedly. Redox cycling may allow other antioxidants, such as vitamin C, to act as pro-oxidants, counter intuitively promoting free radical formation.

Melatonin, once oxidized, cannot be reduced to its former state because it forms several stable end-products upon reacting with free radicals. Therefore, it has been referred to as a terminal (or suicidal) antioxidant.

The only real way to test the effects of supplemental melatonin is to try it. You can buy melatonin at most drug stores, health stores, and just about any store that sells vitamins. Before purchasing any supplements, you will want to look into exactly why you feel the need for this particular supplement. Is your lack of sleep just temporary? Has this been going on for a period of time? It is best to speak to a physician about your problem with sleeping to rule out any serious problems before considering a melatonin supplement as a cure all.

Some will argue the other side of the spectrum: If you are taking, or thinking of taking, melatonin, talk to a physician, preferably one who's not selling melatonin. Having your levels of natural melatonin measured won't tell you anything, since levels vary from person to person and from hour to hour. Chronic use of melatonin supplements may suppress the body's own production of the hormone.

Nobody knows what might happen if you have high natural levels and take a supplement on top of that. Melatonin can interact with other hormones, which is why, in part, pregnant women and children should never take it. Such drugs as aspirin, beta-blockers, and tranquilizers can affect melatonin levels. Finally, nobody knows what the best dosages are to take. Melatonin pills are not standardized. Thus, you really don't know what you're swallowing.

Like many herbal remedies, melatonin is not regulated by the FDA. The only way to know if it works for you is to try it. For some, it works and for others it does not. Talk to your doctor. The two of you should be able to come up with a plan to see if melatonin is right for you. If it is not, your doctor can prescribe a sleeping medication that will be right with your body chemistry.

Let's face it, not all bodies are created equal, so no one pill will work for everyone. Talking with your doctor and experimenting with different ideas is the best way to get a great nights' sleep. You may have to try several different things before you get it right, but you and your doctor will find what works best for you.

## **Natural Sleep Aids that Can Guide You to Dreamland**

If you find yourself counting shadows on the ceiling or watching the numbers tick by on your alarm clock, then you are definitely not alone. Millions of people all over the world have problems sleeping. With some, it is a recurring problem called insomnia and with others, it might be the occasional night or two, every so often.

Regardless of how your sleep problems came to be, you have a plethora of options in regards to sleep aids. However, if you are reluctant to ask your doctor for prescription sleep drugs or other medical alternatives, there are some natural sleep aids that can guide you to dreamland.

Natural sleep aids through the use of herbs have been around for a long time. The Chinese, most notably, have been big proponents of herbal remedies for centuries and stand by their effectiveness. It is just in the past decade or two that herbs have been scrutinized more closely for their beneficial properties in treating everything from stomachaches to colds and to, of course, sleep problems.

If you decide to try one or more of herbal remedies please note that you should discuss them with your doctor first. Other medications you are taking might adversely react to the herbal remedies. In addition, you should also know that these herbs are not sleep cures and will not always work the first time you take them. It may take a few times before you might notice the effects.

One of the oldest and commonly tried and true methods of falling asleep is the cup of herbal tea before bedtime. Chamomile is known for its soothing properties. Ginseng and catnip are other herbs that make for a great, soothing cup of tea with light sedative properties. Valerian is also another herb that is popular as a sleep aid.

It comes in various forms, including tea. However, if you are not a tea person, valerian is also available in supplement form. Research studies into valerian show that for the most part, it does not have any side effects for the general population. It is important to note that valerian is one of the herbs that might take a few weeks for it to really take full effect in your body, so patience would definitely be a virtue in this instance.

Melatonin supplements also help with guiding you to dreamland. It is a naturally occurring hormone in the brain that is produced at night to help you feel drowsy enough to sleep. Now, you can receive melatonin naturally through consuming foods loaded with tryptophan. Tryptophan is an amino acid found in such foods as turkey, soy and milk products. That is why you always hear about a glass of warm milk inducing sleep sometimes.

It seems that this amino acid tryptophan kicks off the production of melatonin, which helps you sleep. If you don't eat enough of the foods that have tryptophan, then chances are that you would need boost in the form of melatonin supplements.

There are other herbal remedies that many people tout for their sleep enhancing properties. Teas made from passionflower, red clover, peppermint or lemon balms are sometimes consumed before bedtime. In addition, supplements of St. John's Wort, kava kava and hops have some firm believers in their properties too.

Of course, natural sleep aids do not necessarily mean herbal remedies. They could also mean non-traditional methods like acupuncture, self-hypnosis, meditation and acupressure. Changing lifestyle habits and routines are a non-medical, natural way to help engage a more restful sleep too.

Missing out on a restful night's sleep brings people to a number of various measures to try and help them deal with the sleep deficit. It could be something as simple as incorporating exercise into your daily routine or rearranging your furniture to follow feng shui practices of harmony. Perhaps practicing deep breathing exercises might help your body and mind relax enough to fall asleep. Visual imagery and muscle relaxation techniques are also other natural alternative sleep aids.

You really need to sit down and determine what factors may be causing your sleepless nights. Depending on what your problem might be, you would then be able to base your choice on the best alternative natural sleep aid that would suit your needs.

## **Pillow Talk – Several Ways to Choose a Pillow for a Great Night's Sleep**

Avoid being a pain in the neck and choose a pillow that will not only support your neck but also your head and upper spine. Your choice of pillow is an essential part of that plan to get a great night's sleep and wake up feeling refreshed instead of tired and groggy. Do you have a sense of what kind of pillow would work best for your needs?

When you set foot into the linen and bedding section of a department store to look for pillows, you might as well be reading hieroglyphics because the array of choices can be dizzying and confusing. The optimal scenario in selecting the best pillow would be to break down the choices into more manageable, understandable parts so you can get a clear picture of your options. Read on below for some valuable insight into what should be considered in your pillow selection.

**1. Determine how you sleep.** Are you a back sleeper? Maybe you are more comfortable lying on your side. Of course, there is a portion of the population that sleeps on their stomachs. The pillow you choose should reflect your main sleeping style because each position needs a different level of pillow support.

- Stomach sleepers, you only need a relatively flat pillow for support, just enough to keep your head and neck in alignment with your spine.

- Side sleepers, you require a pillow that will support your neck and head to ensure that your spine is relaxed in a horizontal position. If just your head or neck is tilted and not in line with the spine, you could suffer from headaches and other problems

- Back sleepers need a pillow that will support the head, neck, shoulders and spine. Your cervical spine has a natural curve in it and the pillow should conform to that curve for maximum comfort and protection.

**2. Firm or squishy, that is the question.** Your personal preference guides you on this particular portion of choosing the right pillow for your needs. Stomach sleepers typically want a softer pillow whereas back or side sleepers need a firmer choice of pillow. What constitutes firm is the amount of filling in the pillow, whether it be foam, feathers or other material. The more material you have, obviously the firmer the pillow.

**3. Fillers are important in the pillow choosing process.** If you have allergies, then you want to consider any pillow that is deemed hypoallergenic. In the old days, that meant you couldn't even consider having a goose down or feather pillow. These days, with ultra-cleaning techniques, this option is absolutely possible for allergy sufferers.

Latex pillows are also available. Latex offers up a contoured pillow that works for supporting the neck and head, thus avoiding undue pressure on the spine. Additional options abound for pillow fillers. Here are but a few more options to think about:

- Cotton and wool pillows
- Memory foam pillows
- Water-filled pillows
- Buckwheat pillows

**4. Size does matter, at least in pillows.** Usually there are two main sizes – a standard and a king size. Keep the size of your bed into account when shopping for pillows, but don't rule out your personal preference for size either. Some side sleepers like the long pillows, also known as body pillows. They will sleep hugged up against the pillow with a leg thrown over it for comfort.

**5. Taking cover with your pillows.** What your pillow is encased in is also of importance. Some people prefer a zipped up casing that protects the pillow itself from stains and protects the user from any errant feathers sticking out or faint fumes from foam pillows. These enclosed casings also help allergy sufferers as well by protecting them from any dust mites harboring in the pillow. Others will use a regular old pillowcase to cover their pillows, in a variety of materials like flannel or cotton.

Some people will skimp on their pillow after taking a gander at some of the prices. The problem with buying a cheaper pillow is that it will not last. What is the use of buying a twenty dollar pillow if you are going to have to buy a new one a year from now? Spend the extra money, not only for the quality, but also for your own comfort as well. We spend a third of our lives in bed, might as well be comfortable!

## **Seven Sleep Aids that Can Help You to Night-Night Land**

Do you find yourself lying in bed at night, hoping for sleep? If you suffer from occasional bouts of insomnia, here are seven sleep aids that can help send you off to night-night land.

**1. Special sleep-friendly pillows.** With the increased awareness of the importance of receiving a good night's sleep, a number of sleep-friendly pillows are now available for sleep-hungry individuals. Some pillows are specifically designed to help reduce the frequency and intensity of snoring. Snoring is one of the greatest detractors to a good night's sleep. The new PillowPositive is a special patented cervical pillow.

Clinical trials have shown its efficacy in helping reduce snoring. PillowPositive encourages the user to position their head in order to avoid positions that leave the airway passages vulnerable to snoring.

Another sleep-friendly pillow is the Nelson Sound Sleeper. The Nelson Sound Sleeper is an ergonomically designed pillow that has built-in speakers that allow relaxing music to be funneled to the user. The Nelson Sound Sleeper is made for the whole body. It supports a healthy inclined position that reflects the body's natural curvature, and which supports the spine. The Nelson Sound Sleeper is designed to support and distribute equally the user's body weight, regardless of what side or sleeping position the sleeper has taken.

**2. The scent of sleep.** Aromatherapy sleep aids that will send you off to dream land sweetly. Although many people scoffed when aromatherapy first caught the public's attention, research shows that essential oils can be quite effective in alleviating all sorts of medical conditions. Lavender has proven to be the most popular choice for inducing sleep.

There are several ways you can use lavender to fall asleep. You can purchase a special aromatherapy diffuser that you can use to expel the aroma in your bedroom before bedtime. You can place a few drops in your hot bath, or you can purchase lavender massage oil and rub it into your skin before nighttime.

Whatever you choose, you will want to remember that essential oils can be surprisingly powerful—a few drops goes a long way. You can also create a small sachet filled with lavender potpourri that you can place in your pillow. Some people have also reported success with the use of jojoba oil, marjoram, and ylang-ylang.

**3. White noise machines.** White noise machines can be particularly effective if you need to fall asleep during the day, where distractions and noise are more prone to keep you awake. Popular models include the Norelco Natural Sound Selector, the Burltech Ultra Heart and Sound Soother, and the Marpac line of Sound Conditioners. Most of these white noise machines are outfitted with several modes and sounds from nature that are designed to send you off to sleep.

A simpler way to gain a similar effect is to use a fan on a low setting, or to set the radio on the classical music station at a very low volume.

**4. Sleep inducing music.** Like essential oils, music is another great way to calm the senses and prepare the body for restful sleep. Many musical CDs specifically designed to send you off to sleep are now available. The SleepNowCD, for instance, contains sonic biofeedback that is designed to minimize anxiety and induce sleep. Another option for insomniacs is the Easy Sleep Tapes for Insomniacs from Hypnosis Concepts. These tapes contain two hypnosis sessions aimed to ease you into restful sleep.

**5. Calming, sleep-inducing herbal teas.** Certain herbs have been proven to induce sleep. Special nighttime or sleepy time teas can be a powerful yet natural method to induce sleep. Chamomile, valerian, and ginger teas are recommended for sleep-seekers. Make sure to drink these hot teas at least an hour before bedtime.

**6. Over the counter sleep aids.** If you find yourself experiencing transient insomnia due to travel or temporary stressors, over the counter sleep aids can help you get the rest you need quickly and easily. Over the counter sleep aids are no substitute to natural sleep, and their use should be discontinued as soon as possible. These drugs are designed to provide fast relief from sleeplessness, but they lose their effectiveness if used for too long.

**7. When all else fails: prescription sleep aids.** With the variety of non-drug sleep aids now available, prescription sleep aids should be avoided, if possible. If you suffer from severe chronic insomnia, visit your doctor to make sure you are not suffering from an underlying disorder or illness. Many sleep aids carry the risk of side effects, and some can even be addictive. Proceed with caution when it comes to prescription sleep aids.

### **Signs That Indicate When Sleeping Pills Are Your Last Resort**

Research has shown that occasional bouts of insomnia affect approximately forty percent of Americans and one out of every ten individuals suffers from more chronic insomnia that is ongoing. Sleeping pills can provide some individuals with relief from their sleeplessness and help improve their chances for getting a restful night's sleep.

Doctors will only prescribe sleep medication for insomnia as a last resort after other methods such as lifestyle alterations (changing one's diet, exercising more regularly, etc.) and behavioral techniques have been undertaken.

What are the signs that indicate that sleeping pills are necessary as a last resort? The National Sleep Foundation has set down guidelines as to when medicating a person for sleep relief becomes essential. First of all the cause of the sleeplessness has to be clearly identified. If difficulties with sleep patterns are affecting an individual's ability to accomplish many routine daily tasks then sleeping pills might need to be taken under advisement.

If behavioral techniques have been refused by the insomniac or have not helped, it may be time for sleeping pills. If a person is suffering from a form of insomnia-related distress, sleeping pills might remedy this. Many doctors start their patients on a small dosage of sleeping meds at the start of behavioral therapy as they favor using the two in conjunction with each other.

Two other instances where sleeping pills might be considered for relief is if the insomnia is short-term or temporary (for example if a person is mourning the loss of a loved one or suffered the loss of a job) and/or if the insomnia is connected in any way with a diagnosed medical or biological condition (for example, premenstrual syndrome) or a stressful event such as a job interview, public speaking or the fear of flying.

Other indications that sleeping pills may be in order are if you suddenly find that your memory is not so good, you have a slow response time and if you find it difficult to control your emotions (for example, crying at inopportune times or sudden bursts of anger). If you are drifting off to sleep at the wheel, that can prove dangerous (and in severe cases, fatal) to yourself and/or others.

If performance problems at work have you concerned, if you find it difficult to concentrate on the simplest tasks and your attention span is very small then perhaps you are in need of a last resort to get a fitful night's sleep.

When doctors prescribe sleeping pills to patients it is necessary for certain criteria to be met. First of all the lowest effective dosage should be given, it should be given on a nightly basis if short-term but if for long-term purposes, it should be intermittent, and finally it should be used in conjunction with psychology (such as behavioral techniques or approaches to good sleep).

Figuring out whether a person is suffering from short or long-term insomnia is so very important in deciding upon a solution to the problem. Behavior modifications are often very successful when short-term insomnia is related to a stressful life situation while long-term insomnia may have other considerations.

Over-the-counter medication (OTC) is an alternative to prescription sleeping pills. Over-the-counter sleeping pills are best used for short-term bouts of insomnia but changes to sleeping habits and/or lifestyle changes are encouraged. Becoming dependent on OTC sleeping pills is not advisable nor is it healthy and excessive use can actually increase the debilitating effects of insomnia.

Over-the-counter medications can have adverse effects on the body so it is important to pay attention to how one's body reacts to the use of them. If you experience any of these common side effects then discontinue use of the pills- blurred vision, constipation, dried mouth and throat, dizziness, drowsiness the following day, forgetfulness and urinary retention.

According to the American Academy of Sleep Medicine, the most common ingredient to be found in over-the-counter sleeping pills is antihistamine. Other names for this ingredient are diphenhydramine hydrochloride, diphenhydramine citrate and doxylamine succinate. The sleep experienced while taking OTC pills is not the exact same quality as the normal sleep of those not taking sleeping pills. It is believed that people who use OTC sleeping pills only experience deep sleep approximately five percent of the night (in comparison to ten to twenty-five of regular unmedicated sleepers).

## **Traveling Tips to Keep You Sleeping**

While traveling, we often push ourselves to our physical limits, almost to the point of exhaustion and deprive ourselves of sleep. Because of this, we may experience symptoms of sleep deprivation including headaches, indigestion, decreased concentration and ability to focus, and irritability. It is imperative that we give our bodies the rest and relaxation it needs each night.

If you are a frequent flier, here are some tips to keep your sleep cycle on track. Try to get mid-morning flights so you're not a zombie from not getting sleep the night before. Schedule your flight so that you arrive at your destination in time for a full night's rest. Do not take red-eye flights unless absolutely necessary. When reserving seats, be sure to choose those that will give you the most legroom, such as an emergency row, or aisle seat. Pack a tote with comfort items such as eyeshades, lip balm, bottled water, earplugs, and moisturizer.

Plan to wear loose clothing on the flight and dress in layers for warmth and comfort. Start to preset your biological clock five days before your flight. If you are flying east go to bed earlier and wake up earlier. If flying west, try to stay up later and get up later. Once you are seated on your flight, reset your watch to the time zone of your destination. Keep yourself hydrated to counteract the dry cabin atmosphere.

When the captain turns off the seatbelt sign take a few jaunts up and down the aisles aid in blood circulation. Do a few stretches to replace and refresh the air in your lungs. Loosen up your clothing to aid in circulation and slip off your shoes. Get comfortable. Eat lightly before and during the flight. Minimize alcoholic beverages. Stay away from caffeinated drinks 4-6 hours before you turn in for the night. Discuss the benefits and possibilities of sleep medication with your doctor before your flight.

Once you check into your hotel, request a room away from noise distractions such as stairways, vending machines, and breakfast rooms. If your room is facing the street, ask for a second floor room. Rooms with eastern and southern exposure in the mornings will leave you more alert in the morning. Being close to the stairs or vending machines almost always means inconsiderate noisy people. Try to acclimate yourself to the time zone you are in and avoid naps.

Try to stay awake the entire day so you do not ruin your night's sleep. Keep the curtains drawn to shield you from the light and noise distractions from outside. Keep the room at a comfortable temperature between 65 and 67 degrees in the afternoon and evening. Go to bed and awaken at the appropriate time for the new time zone. Schedule your outdoor activities at your new destination as soon as possible.

For road travelers, sleep debt can be dangerous to yourself and other drivers as well. If you are planning a road trip, be sure to get plenty of rest the night before. Don't start out if you've had too little sleep or are sleepy when you want to leave. Plan to be refreshed when you depart. Plan your trip according to suggested driving time limits. Don't plan on driving more than 10 hours per day. Make regular stops every 100 miles or every two hours. Try to avoid taking antihistamines as they can cause drowsiness. Try to drive during the day when you are normally awake and stop when you get tired.

It is not a good idea to try to drive straight through. Keep your car temperature cool, turn up the tunes and keep the music selections upbeat. Don't use cruise control if you can help it. Keep your posture at it's optimum while driving. Not doing so will make your back tired. Make a few stops along the way for a drink and a light snack. Don't get catatonic and focus on one point in front of you. Scan your surroundings and keep your eyes moistened with blinking. Traveling with a companion can help as they can watch for signs of fatigue before an accident or catastrophe ensues.

## **Tryptophan – The Trick to Catching Some Zzzz's**

Do you know what tryptophan is? Tryptophan is a vital amino acid that you can only get from foods you eat. Your body cannot produce tryptophan on its own, so it depends on the foods and supplements you eat or consume. In turn, this tryptophan assists the human body in making niacin, a B level vitamin. This chain of biological events helps produce serotonin, a chemical that your body needs in order to “cool off” and relax so that you can slip into dreamland. People with insomnia and characteristics of sleep deprivation have low levels of this serotonin.

There is a myth going around that eating turkey can help you fall asleep. Turkey does have naturally occurring tryptophan in it, but it is not enough to make you sleepy or drowsy. In fact, you would have to eat turkey and turkey alone, without any other condiments or side dishes in order to reap any drowsy benefits. In other words, you would need to eat the turkey on an empty stomach so no other foods are absorbing or diluting the tryptophan and its sedative effects.

The trick to getting drowsy and falling asleep is to eat some foods that have carbohydrates as well as tryptophan. What happens is these carbohydrates stimulate the production of insulin in the body. Insulin helps “move” other chemicals in the body out of the way that can interfere with the tryptophan and the creation of serotonin. There is quite a list of foods that contain the sleep trigger tryptophan, namely dairy and soy. Listed below are just a few examples:

- Most soy products like soy nuts, soybeans, soy milk and tofu
- Seafood like shellfish and other types of fish
- Beans and rice
- Sunflower seeds, peanuts as well as other seeds and nuts
- Dairy items like milk and cheese
- Eggs and meat products

Tryptophan is also available in pill form, by the way of dietary supplements. Because pill form is more concentrated, the tryptophan works differently than when you consume it in the natural way through various food products like those listed above. The tryptophan supplements actually affect your brain processes more quickly, kicking in the serotonin into action. From there, you will feel more relaxed and calm. Then drowsiness sets in and you start going to sleep.

If you are aiming to get your tryptophan in a natural way through food, be sure not to eat a meal or snack high in proteins with those tryptophan-laden foods. The reason for this is high protein meals or snacks will kick another amino acid into high gear and it's called tyrosine. This amino acid gets your blood pumping, stimulating your brain, making you more alert. That's why the carbohydrates paired with foods loaded with tryptophan are recommended.

The tryptophan also affects other characteristics as sort of a side benefit. Because of the relaxed state that the tryptophan amino acid can bring, it can enhance your mood, alleviating symptoms of depression. Arguments and irritability decrease and the tryptophan even help ease symptoms of jet lag. It is especially important to note that a consultation with your doctor is highly recommended before taking any tryptophan in pill or supplement form.

Keeping in mind all of the possible natural sources of tryptophan, there are a number of snacks and meals that you can whip up to help you achieve a good night's sleep. When eating a nighttime snack, be sure and eat the snack about an hour or so before your appointed bed time. The reason behind that is due to the fact that it will take your body a while to break down your food chemically and allow the tryptophan to flow to the brain. Once this happens, it could potentially be lights out for you!

Do not count the tryptophan to be the miracle solution you are hoping for in helping you catch some zzz's. It will help you but the tryptophan is but a small part of the many options available to you in regards to sleep aids. Your best bet would be to choose several other sleep aids in conjunction with the tryptophan route to induce a good night's sleep.

### **Vanquish Those Vices and Be On Your Way to a Better Night's Sleep**

The term vice is popularly applied to various activities considered immoral by some; a list of these might include the use of alcohol and other recreational drugs, gambling, recklessness, cheating, lying, selfishness. It is also used in reference to police vice units who persecute crimes associated with these activities. Often, vice particularly designates a failure to comply with the sexual mores of the time and place: sexual promiscuity, homosexuality.

Behaviors or attitudes going against the established virtues of the culture may also be called vices: for instance, effeminacy is considered a vice in a culture espousing manliness as an essential element of the character of males.

If you suspect you need more ZZZ's, here are ten tips to help you get them:

Maintain a regular bed and wake time schedule including weekends. Our sleep-wake cycle is regulated by a "circadian clock" in our brain and the body's need to balance both sleep time and wake time. A regular waking time in the morning strengthens the circadian function and can help with sleep onset at night. That is also why it is important to keep a regular bedtime and wake-time, even on the weekends when there is the temptation to sleep in.

Establish a regular, relaxing bedtime routine such as soaking in a hot bath or hot tub and then reading a book or listening to soothing music. A relaxing, routine activity right before bedtime

conducted away from bright lights helps separate your sleep time from activities that can cause excitement, stress or anxiety which can make it more difficult to fall asleep, get sound and deep sleep or remain asleep. Avoid arousing activities before bedtime like working, paying bills, engaging in competitive games or family problem-solving.

Some studies suggest that soaking in hot water (such as a hot tub or bath) before retiring to bed can ease the transition into deeper sleep, but it should be done early enough that you are no longer sweating or over-heated. If you are unable to avoid tension and stress, it may be helpful to learn relaxation therapy from a trained professional. Finally, avoid exposure to bright light before bedtime because it signals the neurons that help control the sleep-wake cycle that it is time to awaken, not to sleep.

Create a sleep-conducive environment that is dark, quiet, comfortable and cool. Design your sleep environment to establish the conditions you need for sleep - cool, quiet, dark, comfortable and free of interruptions. Also make your bedroom reflective of the value you place on sleep. Check your room for noise or other distractions, including a bed partner's sleep disruptions such as snoring, light, and a dry or hot environment. Consider using blackout curtains, eye shades, ear plugs, "white noise," humidifiers, fans and other devices.

Sleep on a comfortable mattress and pillows. Make sure your mattress is comfortable and supportive. The one you have been using for years may have exceeded its life expectancy - about 9 or 10 years for most good quality mattresses. Have comfortable pillows and make the room attractive and inviting for sleep but also free of allergens that might affect you and objects that might cause you to slip or fall if you have to get up during the night.

Use your bedroom only for sleep and sex. It is best to take work materials, computers and televisions out of the sleeping environment. Use your bed only for sleep and sex to strengthen the association between bed and sleep. If you associate a particular activity or item with anxiety about sleeping, omit it from your bedtime routine. For example, if looking at a bedroom clock makes you anxious about how much time you have before you must get up; move the clock where you won't see it. Stay away from the activities that cause you anxiety.

Have your evening meal at least 2-3 hours before your regular bedtime. Eating or drinking too much may make you less comfortable when settling down for bed. Don't have a big meal right before bed. Spicy foods may cause heartburn, which makes it harder to fall asleep at night and may cause stomach upset. Try to restrict fluids close to bedtime to prevent nighttime awakenings to go to the bathroom, though herbal teas and milk may help you fall asleep faster and stay asleep.

In general, exercising regularly makes it easier to fall asleep and contributes to sounder sleep. A rigorous workout routine right before bed will make it hard to fall asleep. In addition to making us more alert, our body temperature rises during exercise, and takes as much as 6 hours to begin to drop. A cooler body temperature is associated with sleep onset. Do your workout routine with three hours to spare before bedtime. Late afternoon exercise is the perfect way to help you fall asleep at night.

Avoid caffeine (e.g. coffee, tea, and soft drinks, chocolate) close to bedtime. It can keep you awake. Caffeine is a stimulant, which means it can produce an alerting effect. Caffeine

products, such as coffee, tea, colas and chocolate, remain in the body on average from 3 to 5 hours, but they can affect some people up to 12 hours later.

Even if you do not think caffeine affects you, it may be disrupting and changing the quality of your sleep. Avoiding caffeine within 6-8 hours of going to bed can help improve sleep quality. To determine how much caffeine you ingest daily, check out our Caffeine Calculator.

Stay away from (e.g. cigarettes, tobacco products. Used close to bedtime, it can lead to poor sleep. Nicotine, which is a stimulant, will make it harder to go to sleep if you smoke before bed. When smokers go to sleep, the withdrawal symptoms may keep them awake as well. Nicotine can cause difficulty falling asleep, problems waking in the morning, and may also cause nightmares. Difficulty sleeping is just one more reason to quit smoking. And never smoke in bed or when sleepy!

Avoid alcohol close to bedtime. Though many people believe alcohol calms them, it actually disrupts sleep, causing nighttime awakenings. After a night of getting tanked up, your sleep will be not as peaceful as you might think.

If you have trouble falling asleep, maintaining sleep, awaken earlier than you wish, feel unrefreshed after sleep or suffer from excessive sleepiness during the day or when you wish to be alert, you should also consult your physician. Be sure to tell him/her if you have already tried these tips and for how long.

Try natural sleep aids. There's science behind that warm glass of milk: the tryptophan in it increases serotonin, a natural sleep enhancer. Some doctors suggest herbal treatments such as passionflower, valerian and kava kava, but only to get your sleeping patterns back on track. Then, quit taking them.

## **Deprived of Sleep - America's Sleeping Disorder Nightmare**

Sleep deprivation is an overall lack of the necessary amount of sleep. A person can be deprived of sleep by their body and mind, insomnia, or actively deprived by another individual. Sleep deprivation is sometimes used as an instrument of torture, but it has also been shown to be an effective treatment of depression and other mental illnesses as well.

Sleep deprivation is a common condition that afflicts 47 million American adults. Common causes include: not allowing enough time for sleep, sleep disorders such as obstructive sleep apnea, narcolepsy, and myoclonus, excessive worry or depression, repeated awakenings from noise, working at night and travel across time zones, medical conditions that cause pain, breathing problems, and mental illnesses such as depression. Symptoms can interfere with memory, energy levels, mental abilities, and emotional mood.

A study conducted by the University of Chicago Medical Center in 1999 indicates that the condition drastically affects the body's ability to metabolize glucose, leading to symptoms that mimic early-stage diabetes. Sleep deprivation is sometimes used as a torture device but studies show that it has been an effective treatment for depression and other mental illnesses. Sleep

deprivation is very unhealthy and may also result in irritability, blurred vision, slurred speech, memory lapses, confusion, hallucinations, queasiness, insanity, and eventually death. Getting less than six hours of sleep per night can affect coordination, judgment, and reaction time.

Exhaustion, fatigue and lack of physical energy are common sleep deprivation symptoms. Lack of sleep affects our state of emotions, causing pessimism, sadness, stress and anger. The National Sleep Foundation (NSF) has suggested that social problems such as road rage may be caused, in part, by a national epidemic of sleepiness. Sleep deprivation increases the risk of motor vehicle and work accidents and results in decreased productivity.

The brain needs sleep to function at its highest potential. Without adequate rest, the brain's ability to control speech, access memory, and solve problems are affected. The effect on physical energy is also startling: when glucose metabolism falls, healthy people show signs of age and diabetes at an early age. These physical reactions disappear when the test subject is allowed to rest properly. Driving and other activities can become dangerous without sufficient rest.

Emotional stress or excitement can interfere with sleeping patterns, as can some medical conditions and medication. Food additives and caffeine can also make falling asleep difficult.

Over seventy identified sleeping disorders can disrupt normal nighttime patterns, and more disorders may yet be discovered

Fortunately, most of these disorders can be treated successfully. Symptoms of a possible sleeping disorder may include: insomnia, excessive snoring, the feeling of choking, bad dreams, and abusing sleep aids.

The right amount of sleep is different for every person. While the majority of adults should spend between eight to nine hours asleep, very few people are able to function well on 3-4 hours of sleep per night. The time a person spends asleep also changes with age:

- 0-24 months: 13-17 hours
- Two year olds: 9-13 hours
- Ten year olds: 10-11 hours
- Sixteen to 65 year olds: 6-9 hours
- Over 65 years: 6-8 hours

Here are some sleep tip habits for a good night's rest. Stay away from caffeine, nicotine, and alcohol, especially later in the day. Have a light snack (but avoid eating a large meal) shortly before bedtime. Go to bed and get up at the same times each day, even on weekends. Get regular exercise early in the day. Keep your bedroom cool, dark, and quiet. A fan or soft music can help disguise distracting bedtime noise. Use your bed for only sleep and sex. Before bedtime, do muscle-relaxing exercises or take a warm bath.

Don't take sleeping pills unless your doctor prescribes them. Avoid daytime naps unless they last less than 1 hour and are taken before 3 PM. Try counting sheep or counting backward, which can lull some people to sleep. If you lie in bed awake for more than 30 minutes, get up, go to a different room and read or watch television, and return to bed when you feel sleepy. For a medical diagnosis and treatment, check with your general practitioner. Be on your way to a better night's sleep and a better, more alert state of mind!

## **What You Should Know Before Signing Up for a Sleep Study**

A sleep study, or Polysomnogram, is an overnight recording of sleep pattern and behaviors associated with sleep. It is necessary to determine what stages of sleep an individual achieves and whether any sleep-related abnormalities are present. Several sensors are applied with glue or tape to the body's surface to record brain waves, eye movements, muscle tone, body movements, heart rate, and breathing.

Audiovisual recordings are made also to view later for study. None of the sensors used are painful or harmful. Even the oxygen content of the blood is measured painlessly with a simple clip on the index finger. There are connecting wires to the sensors, but you are free to get up and walk about as needed.

During the study, every attempt is made to let you have a normal night's sleep, well as normal as can be considering you are wired with wires and patches and plugs! Some people typically sleep better when away from home, while others sleep worse, but in either case this does not usually affect the results or the value of the sleep study. The sleep laboratory has a home like, bedroom like atmosphere with a television and a VCR or DVD player.

You can wear your own bedclothes and you can bring your favorite pillow and anything else you normally sleep with. You can even shower in the morning. A trained sleep technologist generally explains all of the recording sensors during its application. He or she is stationed outside the bedroom all night to both monitor the sleep recording and make sure you are comfortable.

What to expect before the sleep study:

During the initial sleep consultation, a sleep specialist will interview you about your sleep habits. The specialist uses your personal and medical history to evaluate symptoms such as difficulty falling asleep, difficulty staying asleep, daytime sleepiness, daytime fatigue, breathing problems in sleep, restless legs at night, and other troublesome behaviors. The sleep specialist may recommend the overnight sleep test, known as a Polysomnogram, to further evaluate your sleep habits

In some cases, both diagnosis and treatment of a breathing problem can be accomplished in a single night. Just like during the polysomnogram, sensors that measure brain waves, eye movements, muscle tone, breathing patterns and blood oxygen levels are applied to your skin using paste and tape. Once you are asleep in your private sleep room, the technologist carefully monitors the sleep diagnostic equipment for any sign of disrupted breathing during sleep.

If interruptions in your breathing such as sleep apnea are seen, the technologist will apply CPAP (Continuous Positive Airway Pressure) during the second half of the test and is the most effective and widely used method of treating sleep apnea. While you sleep, this system gently sends air into your airway through a specially designed mask that fits over your nose and mouth. This creates enough pressure to keep the airway open and produce immediate relief from sleep apnea and snoring.

The CPAP device does not breathe for you. You can breathe at a normal rate. Most people find they get used to the mask after a few minutes and they have little difficulty sleeping with it on. The technologist is trained in using the CPAP apparatus and can answer most questions and concerns that may arise during your study. Feel free to ask him any questions you may have.

Some people have problems with sleepiness in the day or fall asleep at inappropriate times. If you suffer from these symptoms your doctor may send you to the sleep disorders center for the MSLT, or Multiple Sleep Latency Test, which consists of five scheduled "nap" recordings during which you will be allowed to sleep for a brief period. The MSLT is conducted on the day after an overnight polysomnogram (PSG).

On the morning after your PSG some of the sensors will be removed and you'll have the opportunity to change your clothes and freshen up before your first scheduled nap recording. The naps are scheduled two hours apart, with the first one occurring approximately two hours after you wake up in the morning. During the naps, the technologist will monitor your sleep/wake patterns. In between naps you will be free to move about, but you will have to stay awake. A television, VCR, and a DVD player, and some magazines are available in the sleep center and you may wish to bring along something else to do. Generally, the last nap is completed before 7:00 p.m.

These tests are usually pretty simple and can get you back to sleeping normal again.

### **Sleep Diary – A Valuable Tool to Help You Find a Sleep Disorder Solution**

One very valuable tool many people have used is a sleep diary. Sleep diaries have many great effects. It helps you discover patterns in your sleep cycle that a doctor can then analyze and treat. You should also include in your sleep diary a section for a dream journal. This section will help you remember your dreams and in some cases people have been known to learn to completely control their dreams.

The dream section may be used by a psychologist to help analyze any psychological problems that may be affecting your sleep. Sometimes sleeping disorders are not all physical. Sometimes the mind can cause them and in those cases, a psychologist is the best option. Interpreting your dreams may hold the key to you getting a good night's sleep.

Sleep diaries should include the following information:

**What you had to eat that day.** Sometimes the foods you eat can affect your sleep cycle. Some foods are known to have chemicals that cause dreams, cramps, insomnia, and other

things. There are some foods that cause the exact opposite and are good sleep inducers. Knowing what you ate that day can help you see patterns that you can try changing.

**What did you do that day?** You don't have to be extremely detailed on this. Just a basic outline of what was done throughout the day and any significant or stressful events. Some things can cause sleeping problems. Something that was very stressful can also cause sleep problems. For example, if you decided to exercise before bed, you probably will have a problem going to sleep because of the natural chemicals released into the bloodstream. Your activity throughout the day greatly affects your sleep. Knowing what you did that day can help you see patterns that you can try to change.

**What time did you get up?** If you got up too early or slept in too late, your internal sleep cycle could be all screwed up. Most doctors agree that getting up at the same time every morning and going to bed at the same time every night is best. It keeps your body on a natural and regular cycle and is one of the best ways to treat most sleeping disorders. If you got up too early, your body will be tired all day and therefore you will be sleepy during the day. If you slept in too late, your body will have gotten too much sleep and you will be tired and lethargic all day.

**What time did you go to bed?** The same thing goes for this. The amount of sleep you have at night has A LOT to do with your sleep cycle. Too many late nights will throw you out of whack for weeks. Scientists believe that your brain releases beneficial chemicals in the body, but only do so when our internal clocks are at about 2:00 AM. We have not yet been able to figure out why this is done and why at that time. Most doctors say that the best sleep cycle is to go to sleep at ten at night and wake up at six in the morning. This schedule keeps your body healthy.

**Did you wake up in the night?** If you woke up in the night, write it down. Write down if you did anything when you got up. If you got up to go to the bathroom, or let the dog out, or the phone rang, or if you just woke up for no reason. If you can, write down the amount of time it took you to go back to sleep. This will help your doctor see all of your sleep cycle.

**What did you dream?** Your dreams can reveal things that are bothering you in your waking life. A psychologist can help interpret these and help make the proper changes in your life. Depending on your religious beliefs, a psychic or dream interpreter can be called in to do the same thing.

Regardless of who you trust to view this information, the more details you have in it, the easier it will be to treat you. If you think of any other sections you want to add, then add them. This is just a basic outline that can be changed to suit your needs.

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